



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Stay Flu Free

National Influenza Vaccination Week — December 7-13, 2014

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

As fall turns to winter, the flu season will be upon us in force. The best way to avoid influenza is to get immunized.

Dr. Joe Bresee is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. He's joining us today to discuss the importance of getting the flu vaccine.

Welcome to the show, Joe.

[Dr. Bresee] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Joe, let's start with how long does flu season last?

[Dr. Bresee] In general, flu seasons will last for several months in the United States on the national level. Each year begins in the fall, usually peaks between January and March, and ends in the spring. But the timing of flu season is unpredictable, especially at the local level. So, because we can't tell for sure when it will start, when it will peak, and when it will end in every community, we want to make sure that people get vaccinated as early as possible when the flu vaccines become available in the early summer and early fall.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well who should get vaccinated?

[Dr. Bresee] Every one six months of age and older should get vaccinated against the flu each and every year. This is especially important for people at high risk of complications or severe flu should they get infected.

[Dr. Gaynes] Which groups are at higher risk for complications from the flu?

[Dr. Bresee] Well some people are at especially high risk for severe flu or complications. These are people who are very young, like kids under five years of age, anybody sixty-five years and older, and people with underlying health disorders, like heart disease, lung disease, kidney disease, or diseases of the immune system, and pregnant women.

[Dr. Gaynes] Joe, how effective is the vaccine for preventing flu?

[Dr. Bresee] Well, vaccine is the single best way to protect you and your family from the flu each year. Most years the vaccine reduces a person's chance of getting the flu and complications from the flu by about fifty to seventy percent. But, how well it works can vary from season to season and by person. So, remember that vaccine is one of three ways you can protect yourself against the flu. The other ones are good hygiene, like hand washing, covering your coughs, staying home when you are sick, and finally medication. There are medications that your doctor can prescribe to treat the flu if you get it.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are there any side effects from getting vaccinated?

[Dr. Bresee] Well, there are two types of flu vaccines. First, the shots. The most common side effects with the flu shots are soreness or redness in your arm for a day two after getting the vaccine. The nasal spray vaccines can cause runny nose or congestion or low grade fever in some people for again about a day two after getting the vaccine. So these side effects are mild compared with the disease itself which causes hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and tens of thousands of deaths each year in the United States.

Remember that the vaccine is the safest and most effective way to prevent flu each and every year.

[Dr. Gaynes] Joe, where can listeners get more information about the flu vaccine?

[Dr. Bresee] Go to cdc.gov/flu.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Joe. [PAUSE]

I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Joe Bresee about the annual flu vaccine.

Remember: Everyone 6 months and older should be vaccinated. To get your annual flu vaccine, see your healthcare provider or go to a pharmacy, grocery store, or clinic in your area. If you get influenza, talk with your healthcare provider right away about antiviral medication.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.